The Wall-Paintings of Ajanta

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I consider it a great privilege to be able to address such a distinguished gathering of scholars and eminent persons through the courtesy of the Vice-President and the Council of the Society and I thank them heartily for the honour which they have done me. On this occasion I must also say that the Bihar and Orissa Research Society occupies a pre-eminent position among the Societies of its kind in India, and it has made a substantial contribution to the interpretation and advancement of knowledge pertaining to the culture and history of this country. In the long list of great savants and experts who have contributed to your *Journal* there are some who have gone to their final rest, and on an anniversary like this it may be appropriate to revive the memory of their work for inspiration and guidance. Their names are Dr. Vincent A. Smith, Dr. David B. Spooner, Mr. V. H. Jackson, Sir George A. Grierson, Prof. Rakhaldas Bannerji, Mahamahopadhyaya Har Prasad Sastri and Dr. K. P. Jayaswal. May their souls rest in peace!

Now to begin with the subject of my Address I may first tell you something about the history of the country in which the Ajanta caves are situated. Several centuries before the Christian era the Deccan and its adjoining provinces were under the rule of a people who are called

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Andhras in the history of India, and whose descendants are the present-day inhabitants of the Telingana province of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions and the North-eastern districts of the Madras Presidency, situated between the deltas of the rivers Godavari and Krishna. According to Pliny the Andhras ruled over an extensive kingdom comprising as many as "30 fortified towns and an army estimated at 100,000 infantry, 2,000 horsemen and 100 elephants." The Andhra kingdom is also mentioned in the Asokan inscriptions, as one of the foreign countries which had espoused the doctrine of that Emperor. The Archæological Department of Hyderabad, since its inception in 1914, has discovered three rock-cut edicts of Asoka, one of which is at Maski and the other two at Kopbal. These inscriptions, although in an indirect manner, show the penetration of the Buddhist religion to the South-western parts of the Andhra kingdom, yet they do not indicate in any sense that the Andhras were subject to Asoka.

Ethnically the Andhras were a non-Aryan race, apparently a mixture of the aboriginal people of India with the Scythians who entered the Deccan and the Southern parts of the Indian Peninsula at some period during the Iron Age, for their megalithic tombs, which exist in great abundance in the form of cairns, cromlechs, etc., invariably contain iron implements. Their knowledge of metallurgy is also proved by a large number of iron smelting factories which have recently been found at various ancient sites in the Deccan, as also by the traces of old gold workings in South-western parts of Hyderabad State, notably at Maski, Hatti and Wondalli. One of the old shafts which has been examined recently was sunk to a depth of 600 ft., and one wonders how the gold-diggers of those days by manual labour and simple tools could

manage to work down to such depths without the present-day machinery.

Apart from their knowledge of metallurgy these people seem to have developed a fairly high type of culture and acquired considerable skill in the arts of sculpture and painting. In Cave X at Ajanta there are several painted inscriptions, one of which is associated with a subject in which a Raja goes with his attendants to a Bodhi Tree for worship. The Bodhi Tree, which is bedecked with flags, represents the Buddha himself, and the subject is a story from the *Jātakas*. The inscription painted over the head of the Raja was first deciphered by Bhagvanlal Indraji, and recently it has been examined by Dr. H. Lüders, who in a letter to me writes as follows :—

> "After careful examination of the photo of the painted inscription in the Ajanta Cave X in connection with the published drawing I have come to the conclusion that it may be assigned to the middle of the 2nd century B.C. It is true very little is left of the writing but the *bha* with the elongated right vertical, the *va* with the curve tending to be triangular, the *pa* with the rounded corners, the *ya* with the semi-circular base, tally with the characters of the Bharhut inscriptions.
>
> "As regards the inscription carved on the facade of the cave, of which you kindly sent me an excellent estampage, I am sure that it is even earlier, *va*, *pu*, *gha*, *kha* showing Asokan forms. Only the *ra* which consists of a straight line may be a little later. In my opinion the inscription can be safely assigned to about 200 B.C."

These inscriptions are of great value to us in determining the periods of the origin and the development of the art of painting in the Deccan. First of all I show you the figure of the Raja with the inscription painted over it. It is very

indistinct, but as the figure of this Raja appears several times in the delineation of the story it is clear that the inscription is coeval with the painting of the subject. If we accept the view of Lüders in regard to the age of the inscription as correct we find that the art of painting was considerably developed in the second century B.C., and to reach that stage it must have taken several centuries since its origin. To make clear this point I show you some slides representing this subject. In the first slide there is a group of attendants armed with maces, spears and curved weapons which may be swords. One attendant at the extreme left end has an elaborate head-gear and as this figure is painted near the Raja several times in the story he may be the standard-bearer or the life-guard of the Raja. In the next slide the Raja appears with a group of ladies in front of the Bodhi Tree. This scene is important in order to judge the artistic merits of the painting. The fresco is much damaged, first through the inclemencies of weather and afterwards by the indiscreet and vandalistic scribblings of the visitors during the latter half of the last century. The first slide of this subject has been prepared from a photo taken direct from the rock-wall, but as it may be confusing to an ordinary student I have had the painting traced from the original, having eliminated all the scribblings. The Raja faces the Bodhi Tree and is reciting some set prayer with an earnestness and feeling of hope worthy of such functions. The five ladies to his left proper are listening to the prayer and looking with devout attention at the face of the Raja. There is also the figure of a child just near the Bodhi Tree. Perhaps the object of the visit of the Raja is the fulfilment of some vow, or performance of a ceremony in connection with the child. The women behind the Raja, who are also five in number, are apparently attendants—one of

them is holding an umbrella. They are looking in different directions—the elder ones to the Bodhi Tree and the younger to their own objects of interest. There is no monotony either in the gaze or the pose of these ladies. The figures have been painted in the round showing much suppleness in the treatment of limbs. The coiffures, the scarves, the jewellery exhibit a variety of styles, all indicating grace and beauty and a refined artistic taste. The colours used in the original painting are three only—red-ochre, lamp-black, and white of lime. I may also mention here parenthetically that the colours used by the artists of Ajanta were principally earth-colours obtained locally, except lapis-lazuli, which they have used for the blue tint and which was obtained from North-west India.

The next slide shows the Bodhi Tree with a group of ladies, two of whom are dancing and the rest are either playing on musical instruments or clapping. Clapping is still used in the East for marking time both in dancing and singing. The movements of the dancers are indicated by the upper parts of their bodies which are preserved, although the fresco is much damaged. Such poses and steps are common even in the dancing of India to-day; but at the same time they prove that the artist had complete mastery in showing the movement of the body in all possible manners and producing an effect of grace in the general theme of the subject. The musical instrument resembles a trumpet with a broad end, and it might have been made of horn or wood or metal. There are several dancing scenes at Ajanta which I will show you later, and in them drums, cymbals and fiddles have also been painted. The absence of the latter instruments in this scene may indicate that in the 2nd century B.C. the horn or the trumpet was the principal instrument of music. Another

interesting feature in this scene is that the ladies are sitting on stools of beautiful wicker-work. This kind of furniture in the apartments occupied by ladies does not appear in the Deccan at a later period and is not found to-day except for the use of the males. Ladies generally squat on the ground or sit on low wooden seats, the *pirhis* (पाढो). In the frescoes at Ajanta wicker-work seats continue up to the 3rd century A.D., *i.e.*, roughly speaking up to the end of the Andhra rule. This fresco is of interest to the students of Buddhism also who may want to know the period when ladies began to take part in the ritual at the sacred institutions of that faith. Besides the Bodhi Tree, which is apparently a *pipal* (Ficus Religiosa) there are two other trees in the background—one at the extreme right end is a mango (Mangifera Indica), and the other a banyan (Ficus Bengalensis), all three of which are sacred to the Buddhist. Now both these scenes by their artistic and technical qualities show a practice extending over several hundred years in order to attain such high standards, and it may be safe to assume that the art of painting in the Deccan stretches back to the early centuries of the first millennium B.C.

The progress of the art remained slow but steady during the period 200 B.C. to 300 A.D. for in another fresco in the same cave (X), which bears an inscription of 300 A.D., we find that although the intellectual qualities of the art have developed yet the advance in technical skill is hardly perceptible. I show you two scenes from the Shad-Danta-Jātaka, or the story of the six-tusked elephant, who had two wives. In the first scene the Rani is shown in a melancholy mood, bent on taking revenge and she asks her husband, the Raja, to get the tusks of the elephant who was her husband in a previous birth and who had maltreated her by showing love to another wife of his.

The first part of this episode is shown in the bed-room and the second in the court-room, where the Raja is sitting on an ornamental chair with the Rani to his right and ordering the hunters to get the tusks of the elephant in order to humiliate him and thus soothe the anger of the queen. The dresses of the hunters and their crouching attitude are worthy of notice.

The second slide represents the hunters when they have brought the tusks and the Rani faints at their sight. One of the ladies who is standing behind the Raja is fanning the queen. Another is rubbing her soles, another has brought water to sprinkle over her face, and another is biting her finger to restrain her grief. Now apart from the dramatic qualities of the subject there is a human note which at once appeals. For instance, in the beginning we have the idea of revenge borne through jealousy, and ultimately the remorse resulting from an outburst of love at the sight of the tusks of the elephant who was her husband in the previous birth. This human note is predominant in the entire series of Ajanta paintings. The Buddha in his emotions and feelings in his worldly life, as also in the inner struggles to attain Enlightenment by pious devotion, self-sacrifice and sympathy for fellow-creatures, is always shown like an ordinary human being and not a God speaking from heaven. Further, the doctrine of *Nirvana* or final extinction, when looked upon from the point of view of Ajanta paintings, implies a kind of eternal peace or an eternal bliss, for there is an expression of joy, instead that of melancholy, in the art of Ajanta. This expression places the art of Ajanta in apparent contrast to the art of Italy, the general expression of which is one of 'pathos.'

The history of the Andhra kings becomes obscure in the 3rd century A.D. although scions of this race might

have established minor kingdoms in different parts of the Deccan before the extinction of the main dynasty, the Satavahanas of Paithan. The progress of the art of painting on the contrary remained very remarkable from the 4th century A.D. onward until the end of the 5th century, or the first half of the 6th century, when the high water mark was reached. The apparent reason of this development was a greater fusion of the culture of North India (Aryan) with that of the Deccan, so-called Dravidian. From the few specimens of this period, which I am showing, you will be able to realise that a loftier idealism, a richer imagination, and a more refined taste in the pictorial qualities, are noticeable. The influence of the Buddhist doctrine, however, remains supreme, and there is a restraint as opposed to exuberance, which forms the salient feature of the mediæval art of India under Brahmanical faith as shown by its sculpture and architecture. To elucidate my point of view I present to you some scenes from the paintings of Cave I which belong to the 5th century A.D. The first subject is a scene from the Mahajanaka Jātaka, which is a story of a previous life of the Buddha. He has come to beg at his own door after he had renounced the world. The Rani, his wife, finds the voice of the Bhikshu familiar and sends food in a tray to the beggar. The figure of the Buddha has been drawn with very great skill: his highly refined features and also an expression of serenity over his face have given a spiritual significance to the whole painting. The colour scheme is also very good. The pale blue background has brought out the wooden pavilion and its inmates almost in relief. The artist has taken special delight in accentuating the contours of the body of the Rani and in decorating her with a wealth of ornaments and a most beautiful head-dress. In strong contrast to the chaste

and almost classical features of the Buddha is the rough face of the door-keeper, who has a dangling moustache and is sitting on his haunches midway in the door.

Another subject showing intense human feeling is the scene where Mahajanaka after hearing the sermon of a hermit decides to communicate to his wife his intention of renouncing the world. Mahajanaka is shown broaching this unpleasant subject in the central apartment of his palace. His wife is listening to him with attention, but the concern and anxiety felt is more apparent from the faces of the maids, who have all come close to the Rani. One of them is so much unnerved that the white lotus flower which she holds is slipping out of her hand. Some of the heads of the ladies in this group have been drawn with very great skill, particularly those of the two maids, one of whom is standing behind the Raja and another behind the Rani, the latter wearing a blue jacket.

There is another scene from this Jātaka painted on the left wall of Cave I. It represents a dance. Sir C. V. Raman, our eminent physicist, is deeply interested in the origin and development of the musical instruments of India. I have already shown you in a painting of the 2nd century B.C., that the only musical instrument used by the religious orchestra was a trumpet. In this scene we see flutes, cymbals and *tablas* (small drums). Sir C. V. Raman's opinion is that the Indian *tabla* was the first instrument of its kind from which all the seven notes of music could be reproduced, and that was arranged by dividing the top leather covering into three circular bands, brown, white and black, each of varying thickness. Further for stretching the skin sixteen strings were tied round the bowl of the drum. This instrument went to the West from the Orient and although the seven notes of music can be produced by the kettle-drum or tympanum-

drum, and Beethoven has also used the tympanum-drum as an independent instrument of music; in India this was done much earlier. In this fresco we see two *tablas* with the usual strings round their bowls in as perfect a form as they are in India even to-day. The painting belongs to the 5th century A.D., and it is interesting to note that the knowledge of acoustics was so advanced in India at that time that the drum had been made capable of producing all the seven musical notes. The pose of the dancer also in this fresco is very characteristic of the Indian style of dancing. The dresses of the musicians throw light on the style of garments worn and the materials used in making them in those days.

I now pass on to a representation of the Buddha as Prince Siddharta after he has renounced the world. Being the son of a Raja he is wearing a rich crown set with jewels and also other ornaments worthy of the son of a king. He has no upper garment and in this connection I may observe that in the paintings of Ajanta the Rajas are generally shown naked down to their waist, although the courtiers and attendants are fully dressed, some of them wearing a kind of long coat with tight sleeves, like the *angrakha* of the mediæval times. The ladies of high birth have been shown wearing tight bodices of a thin gossamer-like material, almost transparent, while women of middle classes are clad in *cholis* of thicker material. In this fresco also the guard to the right proper of Prince Siddharta is wearing a full-sleeved long coat and the maid between the Prince and the Princess is dressed in a frock of a bluish material.

To return to the figure of Prince Siddharta, his physique is well developed, as of a young man of good habits, while the features are highly refined and there is a calm and repose over his face which reflect the tranquillity

of his mind. I may remark here parenthetically that the features of the Prince are more Aryan in type than those of the Raja painted on the wall of Cave X, whom you saw at the beginning and who ethnically resembles a Maratha of the present day. The pose of the Prince is also very graceful, and the artist in order to show the figure in the round has deepened the outline and given a dark-green background to show the crown and head in relief. The colour scheme is well thought out ; the red bands contrast beautifully with the green foliage of the areca-nut tree and the blue feathers of the peafowls. The Princess has a dark complexion and it may be interesting to note that in the paintings of Ajanta there appears to be no social distinction based on colour. There are some queens with a fair complexion whose husbands are dark, and also *vice versa,* as we see in the present painting. The general complexion of the human figures in Ajanta is dark brown, which is fairly representative of the real complexion of Indians, but in some cases conventional colours have also been given, as green to the inhabitants of the jungle, or red, representing the sun-burnt complexion, to the lower classes. The figure of the Princess shows a motherly grace in general appearance but she is prepossessed with feelings of sorrow at the coming separation from her husband.

The fresco is a large one crowded with many figures. Prince Siddharta himself has been painted of colossal size about 8 ft. in height. The Italian painters of the 15th and 16th centuries always painted their principal figures larger than human size in order to attract the attention of the on-looker at once to the subject. In this fresco we see little *Apsarases,* or heavenly musicians, descending from heaven to congratulate the Prince on his wise decision. Monkeys are leaping on the hills and peafowls are

uttering shrieks of joy, while the wild tribesmen have smiles on their lips, all expressing a common feeling of exultation at the foresight and vision of the Prince. This harmony of feeling between the various orders of creation dissolves on the one hand the complexity of the universe and on the other emphasises the spiritual importance of this event in the progress of human thought. One of the *Apsarases* is playing on a stringed instrument like the *sarangi* of the present day. To illustrate the grandeur and beauty of the Prince, I show you another slide in which the internal calm and peace of mind are more apparent than in the group photograph shown to you just now. Some European critics have compared this subject with the paintings of Michæl Angelo in the Sistine Chapel ; but it may be interesting to note that what the Italian master-artists attained in the 15th or 16th century the artists of Ajanta had attained a thousand years earlier.

To illustrate further the sprititual character of the Ajanta paintings I show you another subject in which Yashodhara, the wife of the Buddha, brings Rahula, their son to be blessed by the Buddha after he had attained Enlightenment. I quote here a translation of a passage from a Buddhist sacred text to show how Yashodhara addressed her husband on this occasion :

> " O Siddharta, that night Rahula was born you rejected your kingdom and went silently away. Now you have a more glorious kingdom instead."

Although the figure of the Buddha is somewhat conventional, its colossal dimensions and the expression of holiness on his face, in juxtaposition to the figures of his wife and child, the former with love-light in her eyes, and the latter looking with boyish curiosity and joy at his father, place this fresco for tenderness of human feeling

and sublimity of religious thought among the best works of art in the world.

The artists of Ajanta have painted woman in a variety of most graceful poses, standing, kneeling, sitting and lying. Although they have shown much imagination in painting her yet they have always treated her with respect, and there is no erotic tendency at Ajanta such as we notice in the classic art of Europe, or in the later Brahman sculpture of India. To the artists of Ajanta woman was a source of happiness and delight, and her activities extended to all aspects of domestic life, religious, moral and social. I show you first a representation of Maya, the mother of the Buddha, after she had seen the dream that a little white elephant descended from heaven and entered her body. There are Brahmans before her who have interpreted the dream and congratulated her on the birth of a child who will ultimately become the Buddha, the Enlightened. She is standing in a graceful attitude leaning against a pillar, but her mind is occupied with the dream and its interpretation. The artist has painted her almost nude for she is wearing only a close-fitted short garment on the lower part of the body, but the scantiness of the dress has been cleverly counter-balanced by the profusion of jewelry and the rich coiffure which at once attract the eye. The idea of nudity has further been minimised by the meditative expression of the face. The painter has thus succeeded in depicting all the grace of a nude form without detracting from the religious character of the subject. The figures of the two Brahmins before her are interesting ethnically. Apparently the one sitting in the middle belonged to Upper India and that close to the Princess to the Western part of the Deccan itself. The subject is painted on the left wall of Cave II which according to some inscriptions belongs to the first half of

the 6th century A.D.

There is another subject in this cave, in which the most beautiful figure is of a lady who has placed her head at the feet of a Raja in a pleading manner apparently to beg mercy. The fresco is much damaged but the figure of the lady is more or less intact. In her prostrate attitude the graceful curve of her back, the perfect shading of the right-half of the body, the beautiful design of the *sari* and the lovely jewelry around the waist, all show art of a high order. There is also a dramatic effect in this painting, for the Raja has unsheathed his sword apparently through anger. The lady close to him has fallen in a very melancholy mood. Another lady of a ruddy complexion has contracted her body in an instinctive manner through fear. Another at the extreme right is running away.

There are some figures painted in the lower part of the wall below this fresco among which the head of a Bhikshu which is unfortunately not clear in this slide, shows a great deal of character.

Among the paintings of women at Ajanta the best is perhaps of a Black Princess, which shows perfect modelling, exquisite decorative treatment and marvellous expression. Although she is painted of a swarthy complexion yet the charm of her graceful figure and fine features is unquestionable. The brown eyes look almost real. The imagination and the artistry of the painter can also be appreciated from the beauty of the coiffure, the design of the pearl ornaments and the subtle charm of the coils which are spread over the temples and the cheeks. The colour scheme also shows a refined taste for the dark-brown of the body fits in admirably with the olive tint of the background. This figure is painted on the back wall

of Cave I, and like the other important paintings of this cave belongs to the 5th century A.D. when the Buddhist art was at its zenith.

For the grace of pose I show you another important painting of Ajanta which is known to artists under the name of the 'Toilet Scene.' A dark princess having completed her toilet is looking at a mirror. Her jewelry and dress show great delicacy of feeling ; but the most striking feature is the grace of pose of the lady herself and of her *chauri*-bearer with a ruddy complexion. The background of this picture shows the effect of sun-light on the conventional bands of hills and the foliage of trees, and proves that the artists of Ajanta understood how to enhance the beauty of their paintings by inserting splashes of light at suitable places.

The stories of the previous births of the Buddha have supplied the artists of Ajanta with a wealth of material for the free play of their fancy and the exhibition of their technical knowledge and artistic skill. In these stories the Buddha is sometimes born as a man, sometimes an animal, sometimes a bird and sometimes even a reptile, but the noble qualities of mercy and self-sacrifice always prove him to be the Great Being. Some of the characters represented in the stories are mythical such as *Apsarases* who are heavenly musicians, human in form but possessing power to fly in the air, *Kinnaras,* who have the upper part of their body like that of a human being and the lower that of a bird ; and *Nagas,* who are the spirits of waters and assume the form of a serpent or that of a human being according to their will. These figures are painted frequently on the walls and ceilings of Ajanta caves and some of them possess great beauty.

The next slide represents a group of *Apsarases* constituting the troupe of Indra's musicians. He is descend-

ing from the clouds with the party to pay his homage to the Buddha. The figure of Indra has been drawn with great skill. His fair complexion, fine features and bejewelled crown at once show him as the Lord of Heaven. To indicate movement the artist has ingeniously painted the necklace, the strings of pearls and the ear-rings inclined on one side instead of hanging downward. Among the musicians who accompany Indra only five are intact now. Two of them are flying on the same plane with Indra, one of them being of fair complexion and the other ruddy. Both have exquisite features and much womanly grace. I shall show you presently enlargements of these two figures. These two *Apsarases* are playing on cymbals. On a lower plane than these two musicians is another playing on a flute. Her hair has been dressed in a very pleasing style. At a still lower level there is another musician whose instrument is not visible but she is carrying a tiny drum on her back. The ornamental ribbons tied round her neck are flying backward in order to indicate movement. The hair of this musician is curly and has been dressed backward in a plain style and not plaited, or tied together in a knot. Behind Indra there is another musician, with a dwarfish figure and irregular features. The nose is particularly ugly. Such figures are purposely brought in by the artists of Ajanta in order to produce a comic effect in the subject. This musician is carrying a stringed instrument probably an *ektara*. The ribbons, the scarf and the decorative trail of the lower garment of this figure are also stretched backward in order to show movement. The blue and white clouds are conventional.

To the right of this group just below the ceiling are two *Kinnaras* with the feathery tails and claws of a bird and the bust of a human being. These figures also are

indistinct in the original painting.

I now pass on to the enlargement of the two *Apsarases* one of which as I have told you before is of a fair complexion and the other ruddy. You yourself can best judge of the skill of the artist in painting these heavenly maidens. In the verandah of Cave XVII on the right wall there are some more *Apsarases*, shown in the act of adoration and bringing offerings to the Buddha. The bust of one of these figures is intact and I show it to you as one of the masterpieces of the art of Ajanta. The *Apsaras* has a headgear resembling a turban, or an elaborate scarf beautifully decorated with flowers and jewels. The artists' love of ornament is also apparent from the lovely pearl necklace, the strings of which are inclined on one side to indicate movement. The ribbons on the back of the figure also convey the same idea. The features have been drawn elegantly and the *Apsaras* is looking sideways apparently through the pressure of air as one feels when moving fast. The idea of volume has been indicated by deepening the outline of the figure.

I show you another flying figure which is painted on the ceiling of Cave II. It apparently represents a *Yaksha*, for there is no musical instrument in his hands. *Yakshas* were spirits of hills, woods or air, and in some cases attendants of superior deities. The present deity is carrying flowers and a fruit, like a mango, as an offering to the Buddha. The complexion of the *Yaksha* is dark yet the features are beautiful and the high lights on the nose, lips, shoulders and chest and the beautiful design of the loin cloth have added to the charm of the picture. The clusters of clouds with their fine brush-work and the position of the legs show rapid movement.

In this slide there is another subject which shows a very pleasing device, a conch resting on a lotus flower.

The conch apparently represents a deity or some religious symbol. The lotus-flower has been sacred to the Buddhists as well as to Brahmans. We find Vishnu holding a stalk of the lotus-creeper and the name of the most prominent Bodhisattva is associated with the flower, *i.e.*, Padmapani. The device shows great beauty of line and an exquisite colour sense. This subject also is painted on the ceiling of Cave II. I show you some more mythical and conventional devices from the ceiling of the same cave. One of them represents a pair of geese. In the *Jātakas* there are several stories showing that the Buddha was born as a golden goose. In this painting the artistic fancy of the painter has given the bird a conventional tail which as a decorative motif shows much beauty and delicacy of design. The colour used is red-ochre mixed with lamp-black. The mixture has two shades, the darker of which has been chosen for the background and the lighter for the figures of the birds, so that the drawing may stand out in relief. The outline has been done in white obtained from lime mixed with some gummy substance. In the original painting the designs in white appear a little prominent from the other colours of the painting.

Of the other two devices one represents a boar which is associated with Vishnu and the other a mermaid. The design of the foliated tails of these mythical creatures is the same in all three panels.

The ceilings of Ajanta show a kaleidoscopic variety of motifs and devices representing floral scrolls, jewelry designs, geometric patterns, mythical figures, both human and animal, acrobatic competitions, animal-fights, snake-charmers and Bacchanalian scenes. Many of the floral designs can be copied with advantage and used for modern requirements, in the form of borders for

saris or for the decoration of furniture and utensils of daily use. The School of Art and Crafts which has recently been established in Hyderabad is manufacturing *sari* borders and silver and copper articles, using freely the Ajanta designs for decorative effect.

One of the most beautiful examples of the decorative art of Ajanta is the ceiling of the shrine of Cave II. In this subject the artist has arranged the floral designs and conventional devices in the form of concentric belts enclosing them ultimately in a rectangular panel in the spandrels of which the figures of four cherubs are painted. The sweet plumpness of these cherubs remind one of their analogues in the West during the Renaissance period. They are bringing offerings of flowers and fruits to the Buddha. Among the designs of the concentric belts one represents a lotus-vine in which flowers of various types are shown. The skill of the artist in the representation of flowers with all the beauty of their form, the delicacy of their petals and stalks and the charm of their colours, is absolutely marvellous. As this floral design is very rich the artist has painted bands of simple devices in black and white apparently to give rest to the eye. Among these motifs some may be symbolical, for example the four conches joined by a Swastika-like mark which represented the esoteric doctrine of the Buddha and was adopted by several other faiths. Another device represents a pair of posts or a gateway which may also be symbolical.

The next subject represents floral designs, fruits and mythical creatures in the form of bulls fighting or sporting with one another. On the stalk of a lotus-creeper a parrot is also seen. There are also two bands representing jewelry designs. The colours used by the artist are very soft and the drawing also shows a fine taste.

A real animal-fight is painted above a pillar in Cave I in which two bulls are fighting. The artist seems to have possessed command not only in showing the plastic beauty of the bodies of these animals, but he has also succeeded in showing the tense feeling which these animals have when engaged in such combats.

I now illustrate a Bacchanalian scene in which a Parthian or Bactrian king is sipping wine in the company of his wife and two other ladies, one of whom is holding a flagon of wine. In the foreground there are two buffoons holding trays of dessert. The features and the dresses of these figures leave no doubt that they are Iranian or Bactrian and for these reasons this fresco for a long time was supposed to represent the Iranian King, Khusru II, who sent an embassy to the Deccan king, Pulukesin II, in the seventh century A.D. But in the paintings of Ajanta foreigners are represented frequently, and as in the time of Asoka the Buddhist religion had penetrated as far North-west as Afghanistan and Bactria, moreover, as the names of Pahlavas, Yavanas and Sakas are often mentioned in the early Indian records, and further as in the 2nd or 1st century B.C., the western Satraps established independent kingdoms in the provinces north of the Deccan and in Kathiawar, the appearance of such figures in the paintings of Ajanta is not a matter of surprise. The floral and fruit designs in the corner panels of this subject are excellently drawn, while the pair of geese, who are looking amorously at one another, shows the artist's sympathy with subhuman beings.

By the 6th century A.D. Buddhism seems to have gathered in its folds various types of Indian races whom we find represented in the paintings of Ajanta. I have already shown you a Bactrian king, and now I place on the screen another subject in which the Buddha is preaching

to a congregation. To the right proper of him there are many figures two of which by their features and headgears distinctly represent people of North-west India or of countries adjoining it, *i.e.*, Afghanistan and Bactria. For the Indian racial types I show you a scene from the Campeya Jātaka in the foreground of which there are two figures, one apparently representing an inhabitant of Bihar or Benares—with a mixture of aboriginal (Santhal) and Aryan blood, and another an inhabitant of Orissa with Dravidian features. The dresses and the style of the hair of these two figures are very characteristic. The one resembling a Bihar inhabitant is wearing a full-sleeved *angrakha* of an embroidered cloth, and the tuft of hair on the crown of his head and the way of dressing the hair are very typical. I think figures of this type may still be seen in the towns of Bihar and adjoining provinces, although fourteen centuries have passed since this Jātaka was painted on the rock-walls of Ajanta. The long hair of the Oriya and the way in which he has placed the upper part of his *dhoti* on his shoulder and back is also very typical, and these peculiarities may be noticed among the inhabitants of Orissa to-day.

As we are now passing through dreadful days on account of the war you may perhaps be interested to know something of the condition of the Indian army during the 5th century A.D. I show you a scene from the Vidhura Pandita Jātaka in which the *Yaksha* General, Purnaka, is returning with his army to his beloved Irandati, the daughter of a *Naga* king, to win whose hand he is taking with him the sagacious Brahmin, Vidhura Pandita. The army consists of both cavalry and infantry. There are also some elephants at the back on which Purnaka and Vidhura Pandita are riding. The footmen are armed with large shields and short curved

swords, resembling very much the *kukris* of the Gurkhas. The horses are of a good breed and their harness shows that the trappings required for the control of the animal had been devised. The next slide is an enlargement of a part of this subject and represents the features of the soldiers better. Ethnically they resemble some war-like tribes of the Deccan, particularly the Bedars, who in ancient times made excellent soldiers and whose descendants are still found in the vicinity of Shorapur in the Gulbarga District of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions. The present Raja of Shorapur, who is a Bedar and has an aquiline nose, resembles very closely the soldier with a blue sword at the top left corner of this painting.

Against the artists of Ajanta some critics have made the charge that they did not understand perspective. I show you now two subjects, one from Cave XVI and another from Cave I. The subject from Cave XVI represents a circular pavilion in the right half of the fresco and a pillared-hall in the left half. Now it is impossible for one who has no sense of perspective to draw accurately a circular object. In this fresco the circular pavilion is admirably drawn, proving that the artists of Ajanta understood perspective thoroughly. The subject from Cave I represents a scene from the life of the Buddha, *Abhisheka*—a ceremonial bath. The Buddha is sitting in a pavilion and servants are pouring water over his head. The drawing of the pillars shows depth clearly and the same idea is also conveyed by the position of the different figures which are painted in the fresco.

In this hasty survey I have tried to convey to you an idea of the salient features of the wall-paintings of Ajanta which I may summarise before concluding my discourse. First of all their great spiritual significance and humane feeling, secondly, the perfect command of the artist in

painting the figures in the round and giving them a variety of poses, thirdly, a highly refined colour sense; fourthly, a clear vision combined with high technical skill in grouping the figures to produce the desired effect; fifthly, the delight of the artist in all that is beautiful in nature, animate or inanimate; and lastly, the sense of humour and a joyous outlook upon life, notwithstanding the restraints of monastic life. These qualities, however, began to disappear with the waning of the Buddhist religion in the seventh century A.D. and although we see reflections of them in the paintings of Badami and Bagh, yet the art there shows clear signs of decadence, and when we come to the times of the paintings of Ellora and Sittannavasal, or still later to those of Tanjore, Cochin and Tirunandik-karai we notice that except conventionality all the beauty and virility of art is gone. In the time of the Mughals there was a revival of the Indian art of painting, but that is of another category, limited principally to miniatures, rather than to a free and bold portrayal of nature and human life in all its aspects.

I may be permitted to say a few words also about the work of preservation which has been carried out at Ajanta in recent years. Through the neglect of centuries and inclemencies of weather the great monasteries and cathedrals there had fallen into a sad state of disrepair. The walls and pillars had decayed, the entrances were choked with debris and silt, the interiors were infested by reptiles, bats and other denizens of the jungle and the frescoes themselves had perished to a large extent, while those which were to be seen on the walls were in a state of rapid deterioration, and gradually falling down in flakes through the pernicious effect of moisture and the mischief wrought by insects. Thanks however to the

generosity of His Exalted Highness the Nizam and the enlightened policy and personal interest of his able minister, the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Akbar Hydari, the cave-temples have been thoroughly repaired and cleaned and the frescoes therein firmly fixed to the wall and preserved from further decay and ruin.

To preserve the frescoes was not an easy task and to achieve it the Archæological Department of Hyderabad entered into a long correspondence with experts all over the world, and finally through the courtesy and kind help of the late Lord Curzon, who was then the Foreign Secretary, and Sir Rennell Rodd, the then British Ambassador in Rome, succeeded in securing the services of two expert artists from Italy who came out to India and worked for two years (1920-22) at Ajanta. The work being immense, the Italian experts had as associates some mechanics of the Archæological Department of Hyderabad, and taught them during their stay the scientific methods of cleaning and preserving the frescoes. The work done by our own mechanics is as good as that done by the Italian experts, and as an example I show you a fresco representing a Bhikshu in the act of adoration, which has been cleaned and preserved by the mechanics of our Department recently. In August last (1940) His Excellency the Viceroy and the Marchioness of Linlithgow visited Ajanta and saw our mechanics at work in Cave XVII. Their Excellencies were pleased to express their appreciation of the scientific methods which are employed in cleaning and preserving the frescoes.

Further, in order to make access to Ajanta easy His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Government have constructed bridges and roads and also started a bus service from Aurangabad, which runs twice daily in each direction. For the benefit of ordinary visitors they have

also published picture-postcards and guide-books, the latter being in English as well as in several Indian vernaculars ; while for the advanced student an authoritative account of the frescoes, accompanied by illustrative plates, based on colour photography, is being printed. Two volumes of this work are already out and the third is passing through the press. His Exalted Highness' Government consider the Ajanta frescoes to be the greatest heritage of Indian culture and art, and as such they recognise their supreme value in the reconstruction of Indian national life, and in the coming renaissance of the art of this country.

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